


# Determinants of Youth Disengagement from Agricultural Opportunities in Rural

**Evidence from Mbinga and Nyasa Districts, Ruvuma Region, Tanzania**

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**ABSTRACT**

Youth disengagement from agriculture poses a critical challenge to rural development in Tanzania, limiting innovation, productivity, and the sector's potential to support livelihoods. This study investigates the determinants of youth disengagement from agricultural opportunities in Mbinga and Nyasa Districts, Ruvuma Region, using a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through focus group discussions with 60 youth participants and 4 key informant interviews with four agricultural extension officers and community development officers. The study is anchored in the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework to examine how individual attitudes, social norms, and structural factors influence youth decisions regarding agricultural engagement. Findings reveal that multiple intersecting factors shape youth disengagement. Agriculture is perceived as labor-intensive, low-reward, and socially unattractive, while economic constraints—such as limited access to capital and inputs and unstable markets—further reduce participation. The availability of alternative non-farming livelihoods, including bodaboda riding, petty trade, and casual labor, draws youth away from farming by offering immediate and reliable income. Institutional support, including loans, subsidies, and extension services, is underutilized due to information gaps and bureaucratic hurdles. The study concludes that addressing youth disengagement requires holistic interventions that improve economic incentives, enhance institutional support, and shift social perceptions of agriculture. Targeted policies and programs that integrate these dimensions can promote youth participation, strengthen rural livelihoods, and contribute to sustainable development in rural Tanzania.

**Keywords**
Agriculture
Economic Constraints
Institutional Support
Rural Tanzania
Social Norms

**Article history**
Received 4 February 2026
Revised 18 March 2026

**JSCD**
Journal of Social and Community Development

VOL. 3, No. 01, pp. 50-64

Accepted 21 March 2026

journal.iistr.org/index.php/JSCD
DOI: 10.56741/IISTR.jscd.002046

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## Introduction

Agriculture is a central pillar of socio-economic development in Tanzania, providing livelihoods to over 70% of the population, contributing nearly 29% to the national GDP, and supplying raw materials to key industrial sectors [1],[2]. Smallholder farmers dominate the sector, cultivating over 90% of arable land, making agriculture a critical driver of rural development and poverty reduction. Beyond production, agriculture supports food security, employment, and economic diversification, particularly in rural areas where alternative income opportunities are limited [3],[4]. Despite its recognized importance, the sector faces persistent challenges including low mechanization, limited access to inputs and markets, climate variability, and reliance on traditional farming methods [5],[6]. Youth engagement in agriculture remains remarkably low across Tanzania and Sub-Saharan Africa. The average age of farmers in Africa exceeds 60 years, highlighting a growing generational gap in agricultural participation [5]. Many youth perceive agriculture as unprofitable, labor-intensive, and socially unattractive, prompting migration to urban centers or engagement in non-farming economic activities such as transport services, petty trading, and casual labor [7],[8]. This disengagement limits the sector's potential for innovation, modernization, and productivity improvements, as youth often possess greater entrepreneurial capacity, energy, and a willingness to adopt modern technologies than older farmers [9].

Recognizing these challenges, the Tanzanian government has implemented several initiatives to enhance youth participation in agriculture. Programs such as Kilimo Kwanza, the Fertilizer Subsidy Program, and the Southern Agricultural Growth Corridor of Tanzania (SAGCOT) aim to provide youth with access to credit, inputs, technology, and training, while promoting investments in large-scale and smallholder farming [10],[11]. Despite these efforts, rural youth remain disengaged mainly from agriculture, highlighting a gap between policy interventions and actual youth participation. While previous studies have identified factors influencing youth disengagement, such as perceived low income, limited land access, inadequate credit, and the appeal of non-farming activities [12],[13], most research focuses on national or regional trends, often overlooking the localised, district-level dynamics that shape youth decisions in rural contexts. In particular, districts like Mbinga and Nyasa in Ruvuma Region, which are endowed

with fertile land, water resources, and agricultural potential, remain under-researched despite exhibiting distinct social, economic, and infrastructural characteristics that may influence youth engagement.

Theoretically, this study is anchored in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which posits that individuals' behaviours are influenced by their attitudes, beliefs, and perceived social norms. In agriculture, youth's decisions to engage or disengage are shaped by perceptions of profitability, risk, social expectations, and available opportunities. By linking youth attitudes and behaviours to agricultural engagement, TRA provides a framework for understanding the determinants of youth disengagement in specific local contexts. This study makes a twofold contribution. First, it gives localised empirical evidence on the determinants of youth disengagement in rural Tanzania, focusing on Mbinga and Nyasa Districts, which are often overlooked in national analyses. Second, it offers actionable insights for policymakers and development practitioners to design targeted interventions that enhance youth participation in agriculture, strengthen rural livelihoods, and contribute to national development goals.

This study is anchored in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which posits that human behaviour is guided by intentions shaped by individual attitudes and subjective norms. According to TRA, a person's decision to engage in a particular activity is influenced by their beliefs about the outcomes of that activity and the social pressures they perceive from their community. In the context of agriculture, youth participation—or disengagement—is determined by their perception of the benefits, risks, and social expectations associated with agricultural activities. For instance, if youth perceive farming as low-income, labor-intensive, or socially undesirable, they are less likely to engage, despite the availability of government incentives or agricultural opportunities. Conversely, positive attitudes towards agriculture, supported by enabling social norms and access to resources, can increase youth engagement [14].

The TRA framework is particularly relevant in understanding rural youth disengagement from agriculture because it captures both individual-level factors (such as attitudes, skills, and risk perception) and social influences (such as family expectations, peer influence, and community norms). In Ruvuma Region, youth may face conflicting signals: while the government promotes agriculture through subsidies, loans, and training, social perceptions and the lure of non-farming economic activities—such as transport services, petty trade, and urban employment—may discourage engagement. Applying TRA enables the study to examine how these cognitive and normative factors interact to shape youth decisions about agricultural participation.

In addition to TRA, the study incorporates elements of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) to contextualize youth engagement within broader socio-economic and

institutional structures. SLF emphasises that livelihoods are influenced by the availability of human, social, natural, financial, and physical capital [15]. In the agricultural context, youth engagement is affected not only by personal attitudes but also by access to fertile land, credit, markets, infrastructure, and extension services. By integrating TRA and SLF, this study examines youth disengagement from a holistic perspective that captures individual beliefs, social norms, and structural opportunities, providing a comprehensive understanding of the determinants of youth participation in agriculture.

Using the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), this study examines the behavioural, social, and structural dimensions that shape youth engagement in agriculture. Specifically, it analyses how youths' attitudes and perceptions toward agriculture influence their decisions to participate, while also considering the role of social norms, peer influence, and family expectations in shaping agricultural involvement. In addition, the study explores key structural and institutional factors such as access to credit, subsidies, land, and markets that either facilitate or constrain youth participation in agricultural activities. By integrating TRA and SLF, the study makes both theoretical and practical contributions: it extends the application of behavioural theory to rural agricultural contexts in Tanzania. It generates empirical evidence to inform policies and interventions that enhance youth engagement in agriculture.

## Research Methodology

### A. Study design

A qualitative case study design was used to investigate the factors influencing youth disengagement from agricultural opportunities in rural Tanzania. The study focused on the sociocultural, economic, and institutional context of Nyasa District, emphasising local youth perceptions, experiences, and agency rather than solely geographic or infrastructural factors. Data were collected through focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs). FGDs enabled participants to share collective perspectives on agricultural engagement, barriers, and motivations. At the same time, KIIs provided insights from community development officers and agricultural extension officers on institutional and policy-level influences. The study was theoretically guided by the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which informed the development of data collection tools and the thematic analysis of qualitative data.

### B. Study setting and population

The study was conducted in Liparamba and Mpepai wards in Nyasa District, Ruvuma Region, Southern Tanzania. Initial engagement was made with ward and village leaders to identify local youth groups and community networks for participant recruitment. Purposive sampling was

used to select 60 youth participants (30 from each ward), aged 18–35 years, to ensure inclusion of those with diverse experiences and levels of agricultural engagement (Table 1). In addition, four key informants were purposively selected, comprising two agricultural extension officers or community development officers from each ward. This sampling approach ensured that both youth perspectives and institutional insights were captured.

**Table 1.** Study participants

| Participant Type | Ward | Female | Male | Total | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Youth (FGDs) | Liparamba | 15 | 15 | 30 | 3 FGDs, 10 participants each |
| Youth (FGDs) | Mpepai | 15 | 15 | 30 | 3 FGDs, 10 participants each |
| Key Informants (KIIs) | Liparamba | 1 | 1 | 2 | Agricultural officers/CDOs |
| Key Informants (KIIs) | Mpepai | 1 | 1 | 2 | Agricultural officers/CDOs |
| Total | | 32 | 32 | 64 | Includes all youth and KIIs |

### C. Data collection

Data were collected between March and May 2025. FGDs were conducted separately in each ward, with three FGDs per ward and 10 participants per group. Discussions explored youth experiences in agriculture, perceived barriers and opportunities, motivations for engaging in or disengaging from agricultural activities, and awareness of government initiatives such as subsidies or youth-targeted programs. KIIs were conducted with four key informants to explore systemic and institutional perspectives on youth agricultural engagement. Interviews focused on policies, available support programs, youth participation trends, and challenges limiting agricultural uptake. All FGDs and KIIs were conducted in Swahili, audio-recorded with participants' consent, and supplemented with detailed field notes to capture observations, non-verbal cues, and community context. Transcripts were produced verbatim and translated into English. Translation accuracy was ensured through back-translation of a subset of transcripts and cross-checking by the research team.

### D. Data analysis

Data were analysed using thematic analysis in accordance with Braun and Clarke's [16] six-step approach. First, familiarisation was achieved through repeated reading of transcripts to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives. Second, coding was conducted independently by two researchers, combining deductive codes derived from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) with inductive codes that emerged directly from the data. Third, related codes were clustered into categories and further developed into broader themes capturing key determinants of youth disengagement from agriculture, including socio-economic constraints, social norms, access to resources, and institutional factors. Fourth, the emerging themes were reviewed across different wards, focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIIs) to ensure consistency and representativeness. Fifth, themes were refined, clearly defined,

and systematically labelled, with illustrative participant quotations identified by ward, gender, and data source (e.g., Female, Liparamba, FGD 1; Male, Mpepai, KII 2). Finally, trustworthiness was ensured through reflexivity, peer debriefing, data triangulation, and the maintenance of audit trails. In contrast, data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached, as indicated by the absence of new codes in successive transcripts.

### E. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Nyasa District Council and relevant local authorities. The research was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki, ensuring respect for participants' dignity, rights, safety, and well-being throughout the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained by removing names and any identifying information from transcripts and reports. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences. No monetary incentives were provided to avoid coercion or undue influence. Collectively, these measures ensured that participants could freely share their experiences while safeguarding their privacy and overall well-being.

## Results

This section presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants, followed by an exploration of the determinants of youth disengagement from agricultural opportunities, focusing on perceptions, economic constraints, alternative opportunities, and resource accessibility (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Determinants of youth disengagement from agriculture

| Determinant Category | Specific Factors Identified | Empirical Evidence from FGDs & KIIs | Implications for Youth Engagement |
|---|---|---|---|
| Youth perceptions of agriculture | Farming is perceived as labor-intensive<br>Low and delayed returns<br>Low social status of farming | Youth described agriculture as "old people's work" and economically unrewarding compared to non-farm jobs. *"Farming requires a lot of effort, but the income is very low."* (Male, Liparamba, FGD 2) | Discourages initial entry into agriculture; reinforces disengagement despite available land and labor |
| Economic and financial constraints | Limited access to capital<br>High cost of inputs (fertilizer, seeds)<br>Market price volatility | Youth lacked funds to purchase inputs and feared losses due to unstable crop prices. *"Without money, it is impossible to grow crops on a meaningful scale."* (Male, Mpepai, FGD 3) | Makes farming economically risky and unattractive relative to daily-income activities |
| Alternative non-farming livelihood opportunities | Bodaboda riding<br>Petty trade<br>Casual labor | Non-farming activities offer immediate and predictable income. *"I earn more riding a* | Agriculture loses competitiveness due to high opportunity costs. |

| Determinant Category | Specific Factors Identified | Empirical Evidence from FGDs & KIIs | Implications for Youth Engagement |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | *bodaboda than if I farm maize for months."* (Male, Liparamba, FGD 1) | |
| Social norms and peer influence | Farming associated with failure or lack of ambition<br>Peer pressure toward non-farm work | Youth reported social discouragement from farming and encouragement to seek urban or business jobs. *"People say we should look for better jobs in town."* (Female, Mpepai, FGD 1) | Reinforces negative attitudes and normalizes disengagement from agriculture |
| Access to land and productive resources | Insecure or limited land access for youth<br>Dependence on family land | Youth without independent land were less likely to invest in agriculture in the long term (reported across FGDs). | Limits youth autonomy and long-term commitment to farming |
| Institutional support and governance | Limited awareness of loans and subsidies<br>Bureaucratic application procedures<br>Weak extension outreach to youth | Youth and KIIs reported that support programs exist but are difficult to access. *"Many youth don't know how to apply."* (Female, Liparamba, FGD 2) | Underutilization of government programs; exclusion of youth from formal agricultural support systems |

## A. Socio-demographic profile of participants

1. Youth participants

The study included 60 youth participants, with equal representation of males and females, recruited from Liparamba (n = 30) and Mpepai (n = 30) wards in Nyasa District. Most participants were aged 18–24 years, reflecting the study's focus on the youth population. Participants were purposively selected to capture variation in gender, age, education status, and household livelihood backgrounds, ensuring diverse perspectives on agricultural engagement and disengagement.

2. Key informants

A total of 4 key informants participated, two from each ward, comprising agricultural extension officers and community development officers with experience supporting youth engagement in agriculture. Their insights provided systemic and institutional perspectives on youth engagement, agricultural policies, and available opportunities.

## B. Youth perceptions of agriculture

Participants generally perceived agriculture as labor-intensive, risky, and low-reward, which discouraged youth engagement. Farming was often described as suitable only for older adults, with limited social prestige for young people.

A 21-year-old male from Liparamba ward agreed that:

*"Farming requires a lot of effort, but the income is very low. I can earn more from bodaboda or small trading than working on a farm all day."*

This statement highlights how youth weigh the effort–reward ratio when deciding whether to engage in agriculture. The immediate, tangible returns from non-farming activities, such as bodaboda riding or petty trade, appear more attractive than the delayed, uncertain benefits of crop production. Such perceptions reinforce the notion that agriculture is neither a viable nor a rewarding livelihood for young people in the study area.

A Under 19-years-old female from Mpepai ward added:

*"Young people see farming as for the older generation. Even if we work hard, people say we should look for better jobs in town."*

This reflection demonstrates that social expectations and generational stereotypes further discourage youth participation in agriculture. Beyond economic considerations, societal views shape career choices, with farming often framed as a low-status, low-prestige occupation for youth. The combination of social norms and economic perceptions creates a double barrier, limiting the appeal of agricultural livelihoods.

Key informants echoed these perceptions:

*"Many youths think agriculture is old people's work. They prefer businesses or casual labor that gives immediate income." (KI, Liparamba)*

This institutional perspective confirms that youth disengagement is both a personal and structural phenomenon. Key informants' observations suggest that youth decisions are influenced not only by individual preferences but also by community attitudes and local labor markets, which increasingly offer alternative income-generating options outside agriculture. Collectively, these findings indicate that perceptions of low profitability, high labor demands, and limited social recognition significantly shape youth disengagement from agriculture. Addressing these perceptual and social barriers is therefore critical for designing interventions to increase youth participation in rural agricultural activities.

**C. Economic constraints**

Financial limitations were consistently cited as a major barrier to youth participation in agriculture. Lack of capital for inputs such as seeds, fertilizer, tools, and irrigation equipment prevented youth from investing in productive farming ventures.

As 20-30 years-old male renowned:

*"We want to farm, but we can`t afford fertilizer or improved seeds. Without money, it is impossible to grow crops on a meaningful scale."* (20-30 years-old male, Mpepai ward)

This statement underscores the critical role of startup capital in enabling agricultural engagement. Even when youth possess interest, knowledge, or labor capacity, insufficient financial resources constrain their ability to produce crops at a scale that could yield meaningful returns. This barrier

is particularly acute for young people who lack collateral to access formal loans, highlighting a structural limitation in supporting youth-led agricultural ventures. Participants also reported challenges in accessing markets and coping with fluctuating crop prices, which added financial uncertainty to farming. The unpredictability of agricultural income, combined with upfront costs, increases the perceived risk–reward imbalance, making alternative income-generating activities more appealing.

As one participant noted:

> *"Even when we manage to grow crops, sometimes the prices at the market are very low, and we end up losing capital. It's safer to work somewhere I know I'll earn daily." (Female, Liparamba, FGD 2)*

This insight demonstrates that market volatility compounds financial barriers, creating an environment where farming is seen as both risky and economically unreliable. Youth are therefore more likely to disengage in favor of non-farm employment or small business ventures that provide immediate and predictable income. In summary, economic constraints, including limited access to capital, a lack of affordable inputs, and unstable market conditions, play a decisive role in youth disengagement from agriculture. Addressing these financial and market-related barriers is essential for increasing youth participation and making agriculture a viable livelihood option.

**D. Alternative non-farming opportunities**

The emergence of non-farming income-generating activities, such as bodaboda riding, petty trade, and casual labor, was identified as a decisive factor in youth disengagement from agriculture. These activities were frequently described as providing faster, more reliable, and more predictable income than the labor-intensive, often uncertain returns from farming.

A male participant from Liparamba ward (FGD 1) explained:

*"I earn more riding a bodaboda than if I farm maize for months. Everyone my age prefers this."*

This perspective highlights the opportunity cost of engaging in agriculture. Youth are making rational economic decisions based on the relative returns of available livelihood options. While farming requires months of investment before yielding any income, non-farming activities provide immediate cash flow, allowing youth to meet daily needs, support families, and pursue personal goals. The preference for alternative livelihoods reflects a pragmatic response to economic constraints and market realities, rather than simple disinterest in farming.

Key informants confirmed these observations:

> *"Youth are leaving farms because alternative economic activities are more attractive and less risky than agriculture." (KI, Mpepai)*

This insight indicates that youth disengagement is shaped not only by the challenges within agriculture but also by the relative attractiveness of alternative economic opportunities. Non-

farming activities are perceived as safer, more flexible, and socially validated, making them compelling choices for young people seeking autonomy and financial independence. Collectively, these findings suggest that youth agricultural engagement cannot be viewed in isolation; it competes directly with other livelihood options. Effective interventions must therefore consider both improving profitability, reducing the risks of farming, and enhancing the perceived value and prestige of agricultural work relative to alternative activities. Without addressing these opportunity-cost considerations, youth participation in agriculture is likely to remain low.

**E. Access to resources and institutional support**

Access to land, credit facilities, and government support programs strongly influenced youth participation in agriculture. Those who could secure land, access subsidies, or obtain loans were more likely to engage in farming, whereas a lack of awareness and bureaucratic challenges limited participation for many others.

A 20-year-old female from Liparamba ward (FGD 2) remarked:

> *"Government loans and fertilizer subsidies help a lot, but many youth don't know how to apply. Without guidance, we give up before even starting."*

This statement illustrates that the mere existence of government programs is insufficient to ensure youth engagement. Information gaps and procedural complexity create barriers, particularly for young people who may lack experience navigating formal institutions. The quote emphasises that access to resources is not only about availability but also about knowledge, guidance, and institutional support that enable youth to leverage these opportunities effectively.

A key informant from Mpepai ward added:

> *"Subsidies and loans exist, but youth often fail to use them because of bureaucratic hurdles and lack of awareness."*

This observation reinforces the notion that institutional and systemic barriers—such as bureaucratic procedures, unclear application processes, or poor dissemination of information—can discourage youth from engaging in agriculture even when resources are technically available. It highlights the need for simplified, youth-friendly processes and proactive outreach to ensure equitable access to agricultural support. Overall, these findings suggest that access to resources and institutional support are critical enablers of youth engagement in agriculture. Effective interventions must go beyond resource allocation to include capacity-building, guidance, and awareness campaigns that empower youth to navigate existing programs. Without such measures, promising initiatives such as fertilizer subsidies and youth loans may remain underutilized, limiting their impact on agricultural participation and rural development.

## Discussion

The findings of this study underscore significant policy, economic, and social gaps that hinder youth engagement in agriculture in rural Tanzania. These gaps manifest in several forms: perceptions of low profitability, financial constraints, the attractiveness of non-farming livelihoods, and limited access to resources and institutional support. These challenges echo broader research on youth participation in agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa. For instance, Sumberg et al. [17] emphasize that youth livelihood decisions are influenced by opportunity costs, risk perceptions, and social norms, highlighting the importance of understanding local contexts in designing effective agricultural interventions. Yet, this study reveals that youth in Nyasa District face multiple barriers that extend beyond personal preference: structural, social, and institutional factors collectively shape decisions to disengage from farming.

The study supports the FAO [18] argument that youth perceptions of agriculture as labor-intensive, low-reward, and socially low-status discourage participation. Participants described farming as physically demanding and financially uncertain, with limited social recognition, particularly for younger adults. These insights suggest that efforts to increase youth engagement must address both economic incentives and social recognition, aligning with Amani and Kihara's [19] observations that youth engagement is more likely when agriculture is framed as a viable, respectable, and profitable livelihood. Social norms that frame farming as an occupation for older adults further reinforce disengagement, demonstrating how sociocultural expectations intersect with economic rationality to influence youth choices.

Economic constraints emerged as a decisive factor shaping disengagement. Limited access to capital, high input costs, and fluctuating crop prices prevented many youth from investing in agriculture at a meaningful scale. These findings align with Nyanga et al. [20] and IFAD [21], who highlight that financial barriers persist as a challenge for young smallholder farmers in rural Africa. The study shows that even motivated youth are constrained by systemic economic factors, underscoring that youth disengagement is not merely a matter of disinterest but also reflects structural inequalities in access to financial and market resources. Without targeted interventions such as youth-friendly credit, subsidies, and market stabilization, agriculture remains an unattractive and risky livelihood.

The emergence of alternative non-farming opportunities such as bodaboda riding, petty trade, and casual labor further shapes youth disengagement. These activities provide immediate, reliable income and social validation, outweighing the delayed returns of farming. This aligns with the Opportunity Cost Framework [17], demonstrating that youth evaluate the relative benefits of available livelihoods. Non-farming opportunities thus compete directly with

agriculture, indicating that interventions must not only reduce the risks and increase the profitability of farming but also enhance its perceived social and economic value. Programs that link youth to high-value agricultural markets or entrepreneurial training may help agriculture compete with alternative livelihoods.

Access to resources and institutional support was another critical determinant. Youth who could access land, loans, and subsidies were more likely to engage in agriculture, while bureaucratic hurdles and lack of information prevented many from leveraging available programs. These findings reinforce previous research by Chirwa and Kydd [22] and the World Bank [23], emphasizing that institutional support, including guidance, awareness campaigns, and youth-friendly extension services, is essential for fostering engagement. The study highlights that the availability of resources alone is insufficient; mechanisms must be adapted to young people's capacities, knowledge, and realities.

Ultimately, this study contributes to theoretical debates on youth livelihoods and agricultural engagement by demonstrating that disengagement is multi-dimensional, shaped by intersecting economic, social, and institutional factors. It extends the Youth Livelihoods Framework and Rational Choice Theory by demonstrating how structural constraints, social norms, and alternative livelihood opportunities jointly shape decision-making. Interventions that fail to address these dimensions risk ineffectiveness, as youth decisions are embedded in a broader socio-economic and cultural context. In conclusion, the findings suggest that increasing youth engagement in agriculture requires a holistic, context-sensitive approach. Policymakers and practitioners must simultaneously improve economic incentives, enhance institutional support, address social perceptions, and account for alternative livelihood opportunities. By integrating these dimensions, interventions can make agriculture a more attractive, feasible, and socially valued pathway for rural youth in Tanzania, contributing to sustainable rural development and youth empowerment.

## Strengths and Limitations

This study's strengths lie in its qualitative, context-specific approach, which provides rich, in-depth insights into the sociocultural, economic, and institutional factors influencing youth disengagement from agriculture in Nyasa District. By purposively including youth from different wards and both genders, as well as key informants with institutional knowledge, the study captures diverse perspectives and triangulates individual and systemic viewpoints. However, the study has limitations. Its qualitative design and relatively small, localized sample may limit generalizability to other districts or regions in Tanzania. Additionally, reliance on self-reported perceptions introduces potential bias, as participants may under- or overstate specific

experiences. Despite these constraints, the findings offer valuable, actionable insights for designing youth-focused agricultural interventions in similar rural contexts.

## Conclusion

The study highlights that a combination of perceptual, economic, and structural factors drives youth disengagement from agriculture in Nyasa District. Youth perceive farming as labor-intensive, low-reward, and socially undervalued, while financial constraints, limited access to inputs, and volatile markets exacerbate disengagement. The availability of alternative livelihoods, such as bodaboda riding and petty trade, further draws youth away from agriculture. Institutional support, including government loans, subsidies, and extension services, remains underutilized due to limited awareness and bureaucratic hurdles. Collectively, these factors illustrate that disengagement is not simply a matter of individual preference but reflects broader social, economic, and institutional dynamics. Moreover, the findings underscore the need for multi-dimensional interventions that address both the attractiveness and viability of agriculture for youth. Efforts to promote youth engagement must go beyond simply providing resources; they must also shift perceptions, improve market stability, and strengthen the accessibility of institutional support. By understanding the interplay of economic opportunities, social norms, and structural constraints, stakeholders can develop targeted strategies to revitalize youth participation in agriculture and enhance rural development outcomes in the region.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the present study, the following recommendations are put forward to enhance youth engagement in the agricultural sector. First, policy interventions should focus on improving the economic incentives for youth in agriculture. This includes providing targeted subsidies, low-interest loans, and affordable access to improved seeds, fertilizers, and irrigation equipment. In parallel, programs should support market linkages and price-stabilization mechanisms to reduce risk and ensure predictable income, making farming a more competitive livelihood than alternative non-farming activities. Second, efforts should aim to enhance institutional support and information dissemination. Local governments, agricultural extension services, and NGOs should implement youth-friendly outreach programs that simplify access to resources, provide training, and raise awareness about available support. Additionally, interventions should address social perceptions of agriculture by promoting youth-led farming successes and integrating agricultural entrepreneurship into local education and vocational programs. By combining economic, institutional, and social strategies, policymakers can create an enabling environment that motivates and sustains youth engagement in rural agriculture.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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